



United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Resources, Community, and  
Economic Development Division

B-257291

May 19, 1994

The Honorable Dale L. Bumpers  
Chairman  
The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural  
Development, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin  
Chairman  
The Honorable Joe Skeen  
Ranking Minority Member  
Subcommittee on Agriculture,  
Rural Development, Food and Drug  
Administration, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
House of Representatives

As requested by the Senate and House conferees for the fiscal year 1994 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) appropriations act (Public Law 103-111), we reviewed the Delta Teachers Academy program, which is funded in part by the Department. This program is intended to improve the quality of teaching by elementary and secondary teachers in the seven-state Delta region--Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. The Department began funding the Academy's efforts for the first time in March 1994.

While the Academy's sponsor has hired the necessary university professors to work with teachers in the program, identified almost all of the locations where faculty-teacher sessions are to occur, and initiated some teacher development sessions, it is too early to assess these efforts in much detail. Therefore, this correspondence provides an overview of the Delta Teachers Academy's activities, expenditures, and implementation efforts to date. Because USDA's involvement with this program is less

than 3 months old, we did not perform a financial audit or evaluate the Department's activities and expenditures.

#### ROLE OF THE DELTA TEACHERS ACADEMY

In 1992, with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, The National Faculty established the Delta Teachers Academy to provide academic and professional development for elementary and secondary teachers in the seven-state region of the Lower Mississippi Delta.<sup>1</sup> (Enclosure 1 shows the Delta region and the counties and parishes involved.) This was seen as a first step in addressing the particularly acute educational needs of the Delta region. The 219 counties that make up the region are among the nation's poorest and least developed. Studies of the region show that its students lag behind the rest of the nation in academic performance in subjects such as English, history, geography, science, and mathematics. Dropout rates are also among the highest in the nation.

The Academy offers educational development activities for teachers aimed at, among other things, increasing their knowledge and understanding of (1) the subjects they teach, (2) teaching approaches, (3) technology and materials available for the classroom, and (4) higher academic standards. By increasing teachers' knowledge and skills, the program expects to improve students' academic performance and attendance.

The National Faculty, which administers the Delta Teachers Academy program, has long been involved in education in the Delta region. Over the two decades before it established the Academy, The National Faculty conducted 18 teacher development programs in the region. The design of the Academy is based on The National Faculty's experience in providing professional renewal for teachers throughout the United States and abroad.

#### ACTIVITIES OF THE ACADEMY

The Academy brings together university scholars from around the country and teachers in the Delta region. Scholars are drawn from The National Faculty's membership and from area colleges and universities. About 400 scholars are on the

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<sup>1</sup>The National Faculty, initiated in 1968 as an affiliate of Phi Beta Kappa, became an independent, nonprofit organization in 1973.

Academy's roster. The Academy does not operate in its own facilities. Instead, it conducts (1) a series of teacher development sessions with university scholars and teachers in participating school districts and (2) "summer institutes" held on college campuses in the region. After these sessions, the teachers are encouraged to develop plans so they can serve as resources for other teachers in their districts, thereby potentially broadening the program's impact on the region.

During the Academy's first year of operation in 1992, 100 teachers from 40 rural school districts participated in the program. The teachers were divided equally among 10 different sites in the Delta region. At each site, the teachers focused on one of five disciplines--English, history, geography, science, or mathematics. There were two sites for each discipline. National Faculty scholars conducted teacher development sessions at each site during the spring and fall of 1992. The sessions were designed specifically to address the needs outlined by the teachers themselves and continued at some of the 1992 sites through 1993.

In addition, during the summer of 1992, the Academy provided two 2-week summer institutes for teachers at the University of Mississippi. Special efforts were made to connect the disciplines through unifying themes and to relate subject areas and teaching approaches to the classes and curricula of the local schools.

In 1994, plans for the Academy call for expanding the scope and impact of the program. While the 1994 program will maintain the same basic format, more teachers and university scholars will participate. About 375 teachers, from 36 school districts, will be selected to create 25 teams in the seven-state area.

The criteria for participation in the program are shown in table 1. To be included in the Academy's program, the school districts, university scholars, and teachers must meet their respective criteria.

Table 1: Selection Criteria

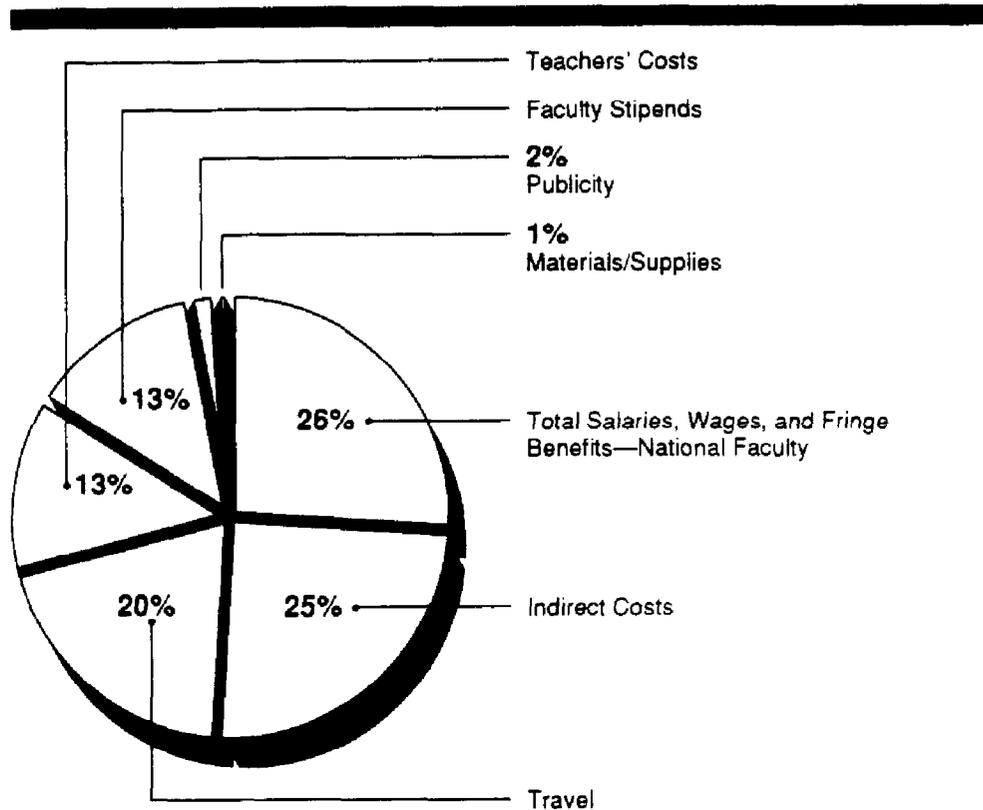
School district	Scholar	Teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Demonstrates academic need.</li> <li>● Local administrators clearly support teachers' involvement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Is an expert in academic field appropriate to team (has made substantial contributions to discipline through teaching and research).</li> <li>● Is willing to relate to teachers as colleagues, not students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teaches in discipline designated at site.</li> <li>● Has 2 or more years of teaching experience (K-12).</li> <li>● Shows potential to become resource teacher for others.</li> </ul>

PROGRAM EXPENDITURES

In accordance with the intention of the conferees, USDA provided \$2 million for the Delta Teachers Academy program for fiscal year 1994. Of this amount, USDA will make \$1.92 million available to The National Faculty to carry out the program's activities. The Department will retain the remaining \$80,000 to cover administrative costs.<sup>2</sup> On the basis of the approved program proposal provided by USDA, figure 1 shows that about 50 percent of the \$1.92 million for the Academy will be spent on (1) The National Faculty's salaries, wages, and fringe benefits and (2) the program's indirect costs (i.e., administrative expenses such as office rent, depreciation, and maintenance). Travel expenses represent the next largest share of the funding, about 20 percent of the total. The costs for teachers' honoraria and release time (i.e., payments for substitute teachers), faculty stipends, publicity, and materials/supplies make up the remaining 29 percent of the expenses.

<sup>2</sup>USDA typically retains between 4 and 8 percent of a program's funding to cover the administrative costs.

Figure 1: Planned Expenditures for the Delta Teachers Academy (FY 1994)



Source: USDA.

IMPLEMENTATION EFFORTS TO DATE

The National Faculty began using USDA funds in March 1994 to implement the Academy's program activities for fiscal year 1994. According to program officials, university scholars have been selected for both the on-site visits and the summer institutes. These scholars represent such institutions as Pennsylvania State University, the University of Wisconsin, Harvard University, the University of North Texas, and the University of California. Some of these scholars also participated in the program last year. As of mid-April 1994, all but one of the 25 teams of teachers and all but one school district where the teacher development sessions will be held had been selected. The selection of these sites was based on recommendations by state departments of education. The number of sites in each state is roughly proportional to the number of that state's counties that fall within the area designated as

the Mississippi Delta region. The 25 sites expected to participate in 1994 are shown in enclosure 2. The university sites have been selected for the 10 summer institutes and are shown in enclosure 3.

The university scholars' on-site visits to the teams of teachers began in March of 1994. These series of three site visits are expected to continue through May and be completed before the summer institutes begin.

As part of the Academy's 1994 program, The National Faculty is working with the University of Colorado's Laboratory for Policy Studies to develop appropriate evaluation instruments and procedures. Two sets of assessment forms will be used--one for the on-site team activities and one for the summer institutes. These assessment forms are being designed to obtain both qualitative and quantitative information. Each on-site activity will be evaluated by every participating teacher.

The Academy's on-site activities are to be monitored by National Faculty staff through direct personal contact with the participating teachers and university scholars. Among the purposes of these visits is ensuring that the program is meeting the needs of the teachers involved. During the year, National Faculty staff and scholars plan to provide evaluations of the work in progress at each site. In addition, the participating scholars are required to submit reports of their work, sharing their observations and assessments of the teams' progress in achieving the Academy's goals.

Because many of these activities have not yet occurred, we are not able to assess their implementation. As the 1994 program progresses and evaluations and reports are submitted, a fuller review of its activities and funding would be possible.

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We are sending copies of this correspondence to the appropriate congressional committees and the Secretary of Agriculture.

B-257291

If I can be of further assistance, or if you would like to discuss this program further, please contact me at (202) 512-5138, or Bob Robinson, Associate Director, at (202) 512-9894.

*W E Gahr fn*

John W. Harman  
Director, Food and  
Agriculture Issues

Enclosures - 3

LOWER MISSISSIPPI DELTA REGION



The Lower Mississippi Delta is comprised of portions of seven states bound together through their ties to the Mississippi River.

Lower Mississippi Delta Counties and Parishes

<u>Arkansas</u>	<u>Illinois</u>	<u>Kentucky</u>	<u>Louisiana</u>
Arkansas	Alexander	Ballard	Acadia
Ashley	Franklin	Caldwell	Allen
Baxter	Gallatin	Calloway	Ascension
Bradley	Hamilton	Carlisle	Assumption
Calhoun	Hardin	Christian	Avoyells
Chicot	Jackson	Crittenden	Caldwell
Clay	Johnson	Fulton	Catahoula
Cleveland	Massac	Graves	Concordia
Craighead	Perry	Henderson	East Baton Rouge
Crittenden	Pope	Hickman	East Carroll
Cross	Pulaski	Hopkins	East Felicia
Dallas	Randolph	Livingston	Evangeline
Desha	Saline	Lyon	Franklin
Drew	Union	Marshall	Grant
Fulton	White	McCracken	Iberia
Grant	Williamson	McLean	Iberville
Greene		Muhlenberg	Jackson
Independence	Total counties - 16	Todd	Jefferson
Izard		Trigg	Lafourche
Jackson		Union	LaSalle
Jefferson		Webster	Lincoln
Lawrence			Livingston
Lee		Total counties - 21	Madison
Lincoln			Morehouse
Lonoke			Orleans
Marion			Ouachita
Mississippi			Pointe Coupee
Monroe			Plaquemines
Ouachita			Rapides
Phillips			Richland
Poinsett			St. Bernard
Prairie			St. Charles
Pulaski			St. Helena
Randolph			St. James
St. Francis			St. John the Baptist
Searcy			St. Landry
Sharp			St. Martin
Stone			Tangipahoa
Union			Tensas
VanBuren			Union
White			Washington
Woodruff			West Baton Rouge
			West Carroll
			West Felicia
			Winn
Total counties - 42			

Total parishes - 45

ENCLOSURE 1

ENCLOSURE 1

Mississippi

Adams  
 Amite  
 Attala  
 Benton  
 Bolivar  
 Carroll  
 Claiborne  
 Coahoma  
 Copiah  
 Covington  
 DeSoto  
 Franklin  
 Grenada  
 Hinds  
 Holmes  
 Humphreys  
 Issaquena  
 Jefferson  
 Jefferson Davis  
 Lafayette  
 Lawrence  
 Leflore  
 Lincoln  
 Madison  
 Marion  
 Marshall  
 Montgomery  
 Panola  
 Pike  
 Quitman  
 Rankin  
 Sharkey  
 Simpson  
 Sunflower  
 Tallahatchie  
 Tate  
 Tippah  
 Tunica  
 Union  
 Walthall  
 Warren  
 Washington  
 Wilkinson  
 Yalobusha  
 Yazoo

Total counties - 45

Missouri

Bollinger  
 Butler  
 Cape Girardeau  
 Carter  
 Crawford  
 Dent  
 Douglas  
 Dunkin  
 Howell  
 Iron  
 Madison  
 Mississippi  
 New Madrid  
 Oregon  
 Ozark  
 Pemiscot  
 Perry  
 Phelps  
 Reynolds  
 Ripley  
 St. Genevieve  
 St. Francois  
 Scott  
 Shannon  
 Stoddard  
 Texas  
 Washington  
 Wayne  
 Wright

Total counties - 29

Tennessee

Benton  
 Carroll  
 Chester  
 Crockett  
 Decatur  
 Dyer  
 Fayette  
 Gibson  
 Hardeman  
 Hardin  
 Haywood  
 Henderson  
 Henry  
 Lake  
 Lauderdale  
 McNairy  
 Madison  
 Obion  
 Shelby  
 Tipton  
 Weakley

Total counties - 21

Grand total - 219

DELTA TEACHERS ACADEMY'S  
TEACHER DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS, 1994

(25 Participating Sites)

Arkansas Elaine School District (English)  
Eudora School District (English, writing)  
Lakeside School District (history)  
Weiner School District (English, history, geography)  
Parkin School District (to be announced)

Illinois Murphysburo School District (science)  
Cairo School District (interdisciplinary)

Kentucky Murray Regional Center (humanities)  
Badget Regional Center (math, science)

Louisiana Allen Parish School District (math, science)  
Lincoln Parish School District (history, geography)  
New Orleans Public Schools (math)  
St. Charles Parish School District (interdisciplinary)  
Catahoula Parish School District (to be announced)  
Acadia Parish (to be announced)

Mississippi Holly Springs School District (English, reading)  
Hollandale School District (English, reading)  
Yazoo City School District (history)  
Wilkinson School District (math, science)  
[A fifth site is being planned]

Missouri Farmington School District (interdisciplinary)  
Sikeston School District (science)  
Caruthersville School District (math)

Tennessee Dyer School District (science)  
Chester School District (English, writing)

DELTA TEACHERS ACADEMY'S SUMMER INSTITUTES, 1994June 12-24

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale  
Discipline: math, science

June 12-24

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville  
Discipline: math, science

June 12-24

University of Mississippi at Oxford  
Discipline: English, history, geography, math, science

July 10-22

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale  
Discipline: English (literature emphasis)

July 10-22

University of Mississippi at Oxford  
Discipline: English, history, geography

July 10-22

Tulane University, New Orleans  
Discipline: humanities

July 17-31

Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches  
Discipline: English (writing emphasis)

July 17-31

Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches  
Discipline: science

July 24-August 5

Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Natchitoches  
Discipline: math

July 24-August 5

Tulane University, New Orleans  
Discipline: history/geography

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